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RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0275
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RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 1287
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000821

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DRL, AF/W
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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: LABOR LEADERS CRITICIZE GON, ANNOUNCE
PROTEST CAMPAIGN IN MAY DAY RALLY

11. (U) Summary: The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) jointly organized a 2009 National May Day rally on May 1 in Abuja, which included organized labor representatives from across the country, as well as a small contingent of high-level government officials. The day's harsh criticism of the GON reflected broader disdain for the GON's inaction on the litany of issues important to organized labor, but also indicated the long and difficult road that the Labor Minister will have to travel to earn the confidence and support necessary for many of his new initiatives. The NLC and TUC will stage a series of major protests over the next two months in five cities to condemn the GON's failure on electoral reform, deregulation of the petroleum sector, and inaction on a new minimum wage. End Summary.

MAY DAY, MAY DAY!

12. (U) On May 1, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) jointly organized a 2009 National May Day rally in Abuja. Unlike his predecessor, President Umaru Yar'Adua has not attended this annual event, and a number of GON representatives who have attended such rallies in the past were also absent. The Minister of Labor and Productivity Prince Adetokunbo Kayode represented the President, but Nigerian Labour Congress President Abdulwaheed Ibrahim Omar dominated the podium with a 16-page list of grievances and indictments against the GON. Conversely, Kayode was booed before, during, and after his formal remarks while he called for unity and harmony between government and labor.

NLC LETS IT ALL OUT

13. (U) Omar's grievances against the GON focused on wages, employment conditions, the global economy, deregulation and privatization, transparency and corruption, refineries, rail transport, labor legislation, pensions, electoral reform, and European Economic Partnership Agreements. He repeated previous hyperbolic NLC warnings of the catastrophic

consequences of unregulated privatization in the downstream petroleum sector, such as drastic unemployment, higher fuel costs, lower wages, and the beginning of the end of organized labor. His comments on corruption were also similar to past remarks -- criticizing the EFCC for its ineffectual progress on prosecuting and punishing guilty public officials.

¶4. (U) It was Omar's remarks on electoral reform, however, that drew the most notable reaction. Omar described the current political landscape as "Nigeria's biggest crisis, largely responsible for almost every major disaster in the country." He stressed the importance of creating a level playing field for all political interests, free from big money, political godfathers, gender identity, ethnicity, and other "primitive" concerns. Omar also lambasted the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), specifically its Chairman, Maurice Iwu, for its "shameful" role in corrupting the 2007 electoral process. After Omar's protracted critique of Nigerian politics, he promised to organize massive protests soon "until genuine electoral reforms are met" and urged all Nigerians to prepare themselves to "resist bad rulers, bad government policies, and bad government decisions."

¶6. (U) The USG was not spared from Omar's tirade. Omar urged the USG to begin paying for "the ecological damage that U.S. companies created in Third World countries from pollution and over-exploitation of resources." He also called for the Obama Administration not to be distracted by "extreme right wing interests who believe that life is only worth living when all

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of those living under the American Empire are on their knees." Most of Omar's remarks, however, were optimistic and supported President Obama, specifically his attention to global warming and latest outreach efforts to Iran, Cuba, and Venezuela. (Note: Organized labor has also been very cooperative with U.S. Mission Nigeria and on many occasions expressed gratitude for our interest in labor issues. End Note.)

NLC CONFIRMS PROTEST MARCHES IN FIVE CITIES

¶5. (SBU) According to NLC and TUC leadership, the May Day rally marks the beginning of a series of protests planned to take place across the country over the next two months, which will raise the entire spectrum of labor's grievances. NLC General Secretary John Odah told LabOff on May 7 that protests have been scheduled in four states: Lagos on May 13; Delta on May 15; Kano on May 19; and Maiduguri on May 21. Odah also confirmed a June protest scheduled for Abuja, but could not yet specify the exact date. Odah said the protests will include not just organized labor, but also several civil society organizations and NGOs. He said that the marches will be on city streets, which he warned will stop traffic flow and normal daily activity. Odah also predicted that the GON will try to stop the protests, but expressed confidence that its attempt to do so will fail. (Note: Post will continue to monitor the situation closely and report details septel. End Note.)

TOUGH CROWD FOR THE LABOR MINISTER

¶7. (U) Labor and Productivity Minister Kayode, who delivered President Yar'Adua's May Day address, was booed by thousands of NLC and TUC members before, during, and after his presentation. (Note: Several union representatives also expressed dissatisfaction with Yar'Adua's absence for the second year in a row, as well as at the dwindling presence of GON representatives. End Note.) Kayode conveyed the GON's "desire for peaceful relations" with organized labor, declaring that "government needs to work together (with labor) in an atmosphere that is devoid of rancor." He also insisted that organized labor should "not only partner with government, but also accept responsibilities along with government to create a new Nigeria anchored on social

justice, due process and the rule of law."

18. (SBU) Comment: Since Adetokunbo Kayode took over as Labor Minister in December 2008, he quickly set up a Standing Committee on Government and Labor Relations, created Nigeria's first National Employment Summit, and contributed to the development of seven new labor laws. Throughout his remarks, Kayode touted the positive and harmonious relationship that Yar'Adua and the Labor Ministry, under his leadership, strongly desire. The tenor of Omar's remarks suggests, however, that Kayode has a ways to go to impress his labor interlocutors, who are looking for more tangible results from him and others in the GON to address their concerns with more than nice words. Like the May Day crowd's response to Kayode's remarks, the GON is pushing against a swelling wave of criticism and discontent every time its promises are followed by inaction. End Comment.

19. (U) This cable was cleared by Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS